United Nations E/2010/NGO/42

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
4 May 2010

Original: English

Substantive session of 2010
New York, 28 June-22 July 2010
Item 2 (c) of the provisional agenda*
Annual ministerial review: implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women

Statement submitted by Priests for Life, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2010/100.

10-34521 (E) 070610

Please recycle

Statement

We cannot speak about gender equality and women's empowerment without recognizing the unique role of women in shaping the future. While the annual ministerial review is being held, it is absolutely vital that we bear in mind what equality means and what it does not mean. Our guide must be fundamental human rights.

Empowerment begins with survival. All our rights, agreements and laws mean nothing if individual lives are not respected and protected. If empowerment is defined as the ability to take the lives of those who are inconvenient or otherwise in our way, it is a tool of oppression. Oppression is precisely what the United Nations was founded to oppose and prevent. We must be careful to ensure that programmes do not seek to empower one group, class, or gender at the expense of another's existence.

Today, we see evidence of the wrong kind of empowerment all around us. Over 40 million babies worldwide die each year by an act some regard as empowering: abortion. Results are staggering and ominous. In many countries, legalization of abortion has not resulted in women's liberation; it has resulted in their elimination through abortion.

Emerging gender imbalances in the populations of Southern and Eastern Asian nations are alarming and have profound implications for future regional stability. Not only do these countries face male-dominated societies, they will face the economic consequences of a dramatically ageing and shrinking workforce in the not-too-distant future. Sex-selective abortion, which is the means by which women are being eliminated in these countries, is bringing inequality and instability where it was supposed to bring equality and empowerment.

What women need is not elimination of their daughters and sons; it is availability of procreative medical care and education. Problems are not solved by taking the lives of those who have problems or those who are perceived to be the problems. The presence of skilled birth attendants, adequate nutrition and access to health care will reduce maternal deaths and strengthen the next generation. Fertility literacy will empower women with little expense.

Options that truly empower are options that affirm life. As the mother of nine children, six living, one miscarried and two aborted, I know which of my actions were empowering and which were destructive.

As one who lost a father and an uncle in America's civil rights struggles, I know that those who fight equality feel justified to take others' lives, but that those who seek equality never do. What nations must offer women is life through procreative care, not the false hope that destroying their children will make their lives better.

True equality and empowerment, then, begins with the proposition that every person be regarded with equal respect and be protected under the law regardless of colour, sex, age, condition of dependency or stage of life. With these principles as its guide, the United Nations can serve the women of the world; indeed, it can serve the world.